

The Polyglot  
High School Entry

Moureen Maudlin's long face was pulled even longer than usual, with her sometimes attractive lips drawn into a not particularly attractive pout and her hooded eyes narrowed, holding poor Milquetoast captive to her newest sob story. Milquetoast was visibly uncomfortable, as he was in every social situation, but politeness and diffidence forbade him from doing something rude, like walk away, or point out her obvious drunkenness and her silver pocket flask in a place with a sign on the door that clearly said "No-Alcohol Room". Moureen, or Moue to those who knew her well enough not to call her by her given name, was never completely sober, it seemed. She was the ultimate extrovert, and simply adored meeting new people, but as she was in an incessant state of inebriation, she was a tad overbearing and tended to not notice (or ignore) whenever people wanted to get out of a conversation.

The famous, ever-crowded and ever popular Lexicon Lounge was hopping, and it was the perfect night for a con to go out and charm the wallet off of someone, or for them to find a pickpocket to do it for them. There was a hierarchy within the Lexicon itself; it had a hotel, as well as various restaurants, study rooms, penthouse apartments, private rooms, bars, nightclubs and nightly entertainment in certain places – this particular night it was a debutante ball for some newcomer into Lexicon society in the Ballroom. The Appendix, the most lavish room of the Lexicon, was the place that Milquetoast was currently trying to find an out of, however unsuccessfully.

Milquetoast fidgeted, and his hand stretched every few seconds to his pocket where his handkerchief resided, evidently longing to take it out and clean his spectacles, one of his many nervous tics. He was not one to go out and party, in fact, he rarely graced his peers with his presence outside of his library sanctuary, so it was

anyone's guess why he was downstairs in the Soiree Salon, a corner of the Appendix, and not hiding upstairs like he usually did whenever there was any slight chance of social interaction. If there was one thing Milquetoast hated, it was being forced to talk to other people, and it wasn't vanity or snobbishness that made his condescensions into the realm of social interaction so infrequent, it was his shyness. As an extreme introvert, Milquetoast was dreadfully awkward. Talking to living, breathing human beings, especially young nymphets like Moue, terrified the man, and as she took another swig of liquor from her conspicuous flask, he was looking at her like she was insane.

Well, Moue probably was what Milquetoast considered insane, with her filthy clothing (doubtlessly to look more pitiable), silver hipflask, drunken mien, and sentimental sob stories; she was perfectly scandalous to a man like him, and presently, she was at the point in her tearjerker tale when she usually broke out faux-sobbing. And there she went, bawling into her manicured hands, black kohl running down her cheeks, staining her shirtfront. Milquetoast froze like a deer in headlights, staring at the weeping girl, completely unsure of what to do. He stuttered for a few moments, fumbling with his pockets, until finally, hands shaking with nervousness, he pulled out his handkerchief, presumably to wipe his glasses and think of what to do with the howling Moue in front of him. Moue grabbed the hankie, assuming it was for her, and blew her nose into it, soiling it with black mascara and smudging her face further. She was a terrific mess.

Milquetoast continued stammering, changing it up occasionally by switching his umms for uhhs or ers for nervous coughs, utterly distraught. The sob story that Moue had been feeding him was about how her scummy fiancé had moved her checking account into his a few days before their wedding, getting their finances together, and

then promptly skipped town, gone, leaving the bride at the altar. She shared her woes profusely, rather overplaying the damsel in distress part, speaking about her broken heart and the pain of it all, how she was left penniless, a young orphan with no job or family to help her, and had come down to work as a dancer at the Soiree Salon, but had been fired because of a rumor another spiteful dancer had told the boss. When she got to the part of the story where she was told what the rumor was, that she had stolen from the boss, and how the boss had beaten her, that was the part when she began to cry. And cry she most definitely did. Milquetoast was abysmal at comforting or anything to do with communication, naturally, but he was very courteous and mannerly, overly so, and of course, he offered her money.

“I, uh, um, I, er, I’m, well, I’m s-sorry, ma’am, uh,” he managed. He cracked his shaking knuckles, another nervous tic, and tried again. “Um, I’m v-v-very sorry, uh, I-I could, uh, succor you, you know, uh, if you need it.” Now, Moue was not nearly as educated and erudite as Milquetoast, and the word succor sounded rather allusive and exciting to her sloshed and foggy brain. She thought he was offering something quite different, so with substantially lessened tears, she glanced at him.

“Well, I don’t know,” she coyly responded, spare eye drops, er, tears still running down her face. Milquetoast’s still-shaking hands brawled with his pocket until he finally pulled out his wallet, relinquishing a fifty-dollar bill as his quivering hands dropped several coins. Moue was quick to pick them up for him, batting her eyelashes still, oblivious to the fact that they were very gloppy from the earlier waterworks. “Oh, well, what’s the moolah for, mister?” she giggled as she got back up, stumbling and still drunk as she handed his change back to him. “Didn’t you hear, I was a dancer, not a -”

and then she said a word that made Milquetoast turn absolutely lobster red. “N-no!” he spluttered. “I w-was, uh, um, uh, I was g-giving you money because y-you, y-you said you were broke! N-not for a-any-t-thing else!” he cut off, blushing in silence, completely mortified at the situation.

“What? Oh, well, thank you, sir!” Moue grabbed the bill out of his hand, hurrying away as she noticed a new sucker come through the door. She slipped into the ladies room to powder her nose, or rather, her entire face, erasing any trace of earlier crying, and began on her next dope to dupe.

Milquetoast did everything short of sprint up to the library, still up to his socks in Moue’s tears mixed with his perspiration from going into fight or flight mode when she began to cry. That was why he rarely went out of his library; the one time he did leave, it was inevitable he would meet someone that would scar him for the rest of his social life or lack thereof. The poor man went and studied microbes in his microscope, one of his favorite activities, but nothing would shake the humiliation that he felt. *Why would you even bother?* He asked himself, chagrined. *You don’t belong in that world*, he shook his head sadly. *Never have, never will. Just stay up here. The microbes won’t cry, at least.*

He made a firm decision never to subject himself to any more humiliation; he would no longer bother returning downstairs, where people just didn’t understand him at all. Sighing, Milquetoast heard a knock on the door. He grappled internally on whether or not to even bother opening it. After all, it probably was someone from downstairs, but did that break the rule of going downstairs if downstairs came up to you? He determined that it did not, in fact, break the rule, and that it was a technical loophole.

He trudged dutifully to the door, and cracked it open a smidge.

“Well, howdyado, good sir?” a short woman said very quickly, blending her words together. She flipped her long locks over a shoulder and smiled brightly, revealing the cigarette in her mouth. She took a drag and the smoke settled around her like a cloud. It was hard to see her face, or breathe, for Milquetoast, who never had the courage to try anything like tobacco, and he could hardly make out her very red lips and very colored cheeks, or even her false eyelashes and gaudy metallic eye makeup. He could still see her exceedingly short cheetah-print miniskirt, however, quite clearly indeed. Milquetoast averted his eyes from her outfit out of courtesy, and tried to see her eyes.

“Miasma Meretricious, at your service, good sir,” she held out a jaundiced hand out of the smoke cloud around her. It looked rather like disembodied fingers coming out of the fog, and it was somewhat disconcerting to Milquetoast. He took her hand and shook it gingerly, flopping his handshake like a fish, and pulled back just as fast, if that was possible.

“Uh, hello,” he uneasily waved at her. “M-may I ask, um, er, do you r-require something, uh, from me?” he finished, reaching for his pocket to fish out his handkerchief and then to his dismay, he realized that it was no longer there.

“Well, yes, I do require something from you. You were at the Soiree Salon earlier this night, yes?” she asked, direct to the point. Milquetoast nodded slowly, unsure of where this was going. “And you, Mr. Milquetoast, bought a drink, did you not?” Milquetoast nodded again. He had bought a nice glass of vitamin fortified mineral water, which he had read in a scientific article was good for the health. “But did you pay for it,

sir?” Miasma asked, her cloud of smoke moving, so she must have been shaking her head. Milquetoast thought back and shook his head. “No, ma’am, I am a t-tenant of the Lexicon, um, uh, so, er, anything I b-buy here goes on my bill t-that I pay at the end, um, of the m-month.” He mumbled self-consciously. He probably should have explained that to the bartender, but he was too timid to approach the muscular, formidable man again after he ordered.

“No, that is not correct, Mr. Milquetoast.” She shook her head again, the cloud moving with her. Miasma took another drag from her cigarette, and continued. “You are required to pay for your drinks on sight, so that you are accountable for them. What if, for instance, you gave a fifty-dollar bill to one of our ex-employees and she ordered drinks under your name, hm?” That was oddly specific, he mused. Did she know about the money he gave to Moue? “No one would stop her since you are not a regular at the Salon, sir, or any of our nightclubs, and she could go to town with drinks under your name. That is why you must pay up front. You have, however unknowingly, committed a class one misdemeanor, petty larceny, by not paying for your order. We have two options here, don’t we?” she paused to take another cigarette drag, but Milquetoast stayed mute. He could not believe his ears. “We could kick you out of the Lexicon. Or, you could pay up.”

“I-I-I, um, uh, I’ll p-pay up! Just h-hold on, um,” he struggled, pulling out his wallet once again, but found it missing. Where had it gone? He mentally retraced his steps and then it dawned on him. Of course! Moue Maudlin had stolen from him! What a fraud! “I seem to, um, have, uh, I-lost my wallet, er,” he scratched the back of his neck.

“Oh, no, sir, you’ve lost your chance. Boys,” she called out to something behind her. Two hulking men marched up past her. Had they been there the whole time? Milquetoast had no idea, but her “boys” were coming his way.

“L-look, sirs, I’ve, um, I’ve j-just lost, uh, my wallet! I h-have money, uh, in-inside!” he stuttered violently turning to run away, when the henchmen descended upon him.

The lexicologist woke up with a start. What a strange dream he had been having! Of course, it was because he was in the M’s. He always fell asleep when he was categorizing, and only when he was in the M’s. He shook his head. What had he been doing before he fell asleep? He lifted his head and wiped the drool off of the dictionary, sheepishly, and looked at his steno pad beside him. What was that for? He glanced down the list...Milquetoast, Moue, Maudlin, Meretricious, some of his favorite M words. What was the list for, though? Oh! He remembered. It was the list of words that they were going to abolish from the dictionary, they being the Word Board. He shook his head. No, he would not let them take these great words from the English language. Even if he was the only one who felt like words had thoughts and personalities, he was too attached to them to let them go. Many of his dreams had been about the Lexicon Lounge and its inhabitants; words on the abolish list were often there, in the most random of situations, and as long as he had authority over words, he would be their savior.

The lexicologist loved words in the way that folks on the street liked to breathe, and he would never stop loving them as long as he lived. He would never stop working for a cause he believed in with all of his heart. And with that thought in his head, he



raised his steno pad, ripped off that page, and continued onto his next word, methuselah.